

### The idea of freedom in Poland

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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

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#### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Stoklosa, K. (2006). The idea of freedom in Poland. *Totalitarismus und Demokratie*, 3(2), 247-263. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-310603>

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# The Idea of Freedom in Poland

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## Abstract

Polen musste im Laufe der Geschichte immer wieder um seine Freiheit kämpfen: zuerst nach den Teilungen und der nationalen Wiederbegründung 1918, dann während des Zweiten Weltkrieges und schließlich während der kommunistischen Herrschaft. Bei der Wiedererlangung seiner Unabhängigkeit 1918 wie 1989 standen die Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika im Verständnis Polens Pate. Das führte zur Entstehung eines Mythos und zur Idealisierung der USA in Polen. Der Beitrag untersucht das Freiheitsverständnis in der polnischen Bevölkerung, vergleicht die amerikanischen und polnischen Werte miteinander und behandelt abschließend die Wahrnehmung der USA in Polen.

“Freedom” and “liberty” are the two central socio-political terms, which Americans constantly refer to. In the USA the discovery of freedom is deemed to be “a very special, unique, marvellous American gift to humanity.”<sup>1</sup> While the word “freedom” is of Germanic-Celtic origin and refers to an affiliation with the community of the free, e.g. the tribe, “liberty” is derived from the ancient Roman tradition and originally refers to a high degree of personal independence in a hierarchically structured society. From the Polish perspective America has been a synonym of “freedom” for a long time. At the present the values of “liberty” are accentuated above all. Recently, since the beginning of the Second Gulf War Poland is perceived within Europe as a country between Europe and the USA. The American life style affects Polish political, economical and everyday life. This is connected to the Polish freedom movement and the Polish-American relations in the past on the one hand and the current security-concept at the time on the other.

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1 Cf. Gerhard Besier, The Concept of Freedom in the Anglo-American World. In: TD, 2 (2005), p. 375–388, here 377 f.; Gerhard Besier/Gerhard Lindemann, Im Namen der Freiheit. Die amerikanische Mission, Göttingen 2006, passim.

In an interview the former Polish foreign minister, Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, pointed out that he liked the “enthusiasm of the Americans, and the fact that they don’t complain much”.<sup>2</sup> This view of America is very widespread in Poland. Especially the *freedom* of thought and action in everyday life is highly esteemed by the Polish people. In Polish public opinion the United States are seen as a country of great opportunities, opportunities which were inaccessible to the Polish people for a long time, especially freedom and wealth.<sup>3</sup>

How do the Poles perceive the American “freedom” and “liberty”? How deep is the Poles’ knowledge of the United States? Does this fascination relate to an economic model, which they would like to adopt themselves? In this article I will try to explain the pro-American attitude of the Poles in connection to the tradition of freedom.

### The perception of the United States in the Polish society

The Poles associate the USA with the following terms: wealth, great power, war (11<sup>th</sup> September), hard work, a well developed economy, ally, freedom and democracy.<sup>4</sup> The table 1 summarises the answers in percentage to the question: What do you connect with the United States?

A study carried out in January 2003 by the Warsaw based opinion research institute CBOS revealed that 58 % of the Polish people perceived the Americans to be likable, 26 % of the respondents were indifferent towards the Americans, while only 12 % experienced feelings of dislike towards them. These results place the American people at the top of the Polish likeability rankings. Compared with results obtained in 1999 their popularity even grew by 4 %. In February 2003 a slim majority of 51 % were critical of the support the Polish government offered to the United States in connection with the war in Iraq. The Polish government had, along with several other nations, officially backed US actions in the form of the so-called “Letter of the Eight” and sent the troops into Iraq.<sup>5</sup> A special emphasis must be placed on the fact that only 25 % of those questioned categor-

2 Agnieszka Niezgodna, On i oni [He and they]. In: *Polityka*, 31 (2005), p. 30–34, here 30.

3 Cf. Michał Wenzel/Krzysztof Zagórski, Między amerykańskim a europejskim modelem społecznym – wybory Polaków [Between the American and the European Social Model – the Decision of the Poles]. In: Lena Kolarska-Bobińska/Jacek Kucharczyk/Piotr Maciej Kaczyński (ed.), *Mosty przez Atlantyk? Postawy Polaków, Czechów, Słowaków wobec Stanów Zjednoczonych* [Bridges Over the Atlantic? The Attitudes of the Poles, Czechs and Slovaks Towards the United States], Warsaw 2005, p. 57–84, here 84.

4 Cf. Michael Fleischer, *Europa, Niemcy, USA i Rosja w polskim systemie kultury* [Europe, Germany, USA and Russia in the Polish Culture System], Wrocław 2004, p. 126.

5 CBOS-Survey (<http://www.cbos.pl>), January 2003.

Table 1: Perception of the United States in the Polish society

Terms	Attributes	Percentage
wealth	wealth, prosperity	33.5
superpower, force	superpower, force, big, a big country, enormity	29.7
war/aggression	war, 11 <sup>th</sup> September, aggression/interference, hegemony/ domination, power, World Policeman, NATO	25.4
economy	work, technology, dollar, money, economy, capitalism	11.8
the Polish perspective	ally, friend, partner, assistance, the country of dreams, "It is better."	9.3
other characteristics	democracy, freedom, opportunities, tolerance	7.1

Source: Michael Fleischer, *Europa, Niemcy, USA i Rosja w polskim systemie kultury* [Europe, Germany, USA and Russia in the Polish Culture System], Wrocław 2004, p. 127.

ically opposed this act, while 26 % strongly disagreed. 29 % of the Polish respondents supported the action of their government and 20 % had no definite opinion on this topic.<sup>6</sup>

The majority of the Polish public (52 %) sees no contradiction between a well functioning cooperation with the USA and integration in the European Union. This conviction is spread widely among politically active population. 46 % of the supporters of Poland's accession to the EU believe that Poland should cooperate very closely with the USA. A year before the EU enlargement Polish public opinion did not see any inconsistency between a more intensive cooperation with the United States and a consolidation of the European integration. The majority wished that the European Union were founded on close cooperation with the USA.<sup>7</sup>

6 Cf. *ibid.*, February 2003.

7 Cf. *ibid.*, May 2003.

## Polish Myths of America

The great geographical distance between Poland and the United States assists the formation of myths. The myth of American wealth was always extremely wide spread in Poland. Over time this myth took on different shapes and meanings. Initially these impressions had an exotic and fairy tale character. America was portrayed as a land full of treasures and gold mountains. In time gold was replaced by the dollar, which then became the myth of American wealth. At the beginning of the twentieth century, i.e. the era of emigration from Poles to the United States in search of work, the myth of the dollar was particularly prevalent. In Poland the USA was constantly connected to progress and modernity. The American advertisement and pop culture, which was also wide spread in Poland, greatly enhanced this image.

One of the most important American legends was the myth of freedom, democracy and a liberal society. Already in the first years after her independence North America was a harbour for those, who were rejected by other societies, for both criminals and victims of discrimination. During the periods, in which Poland was not sovereign, American freedom and democracy were primarily viewed from a political angle. The USA was a sovereign and independent state, whose leaders were democratically elected. Following a short period of freedom after 1918 Poland once more lost her independence and initially found herself under German rule followed by Soviet rule. In particularly during the Soviet period American freedom and democracy had a special meaning for Poland.

The United States were regarded as the land, where everyone had equal wealth and the same chances, where hard work and not the luck of birth determined the worth of a person. This was the greatest American myth, i.e. the myth of American success, to which everyone no matter their descent had equal access to. This myth originated in the Puritan religion, according to which a hard working life is rewarded by God in the form of wealth. Wealth illustrated God's benevolence and poverty the absence of it. In Poland it was emphasised that the chance of wealth in America was offered to everyone, who was willing to try for it and not only for a certain class of millionaire. The impression of the USA as the land, which gives everyone a chance to realise themselves and to live in relative wealth was always common in Poland. This constitutes the Polish idea of Paradise. After the fall of Communism the USA became an example for the Poles to emulate and the American dream could be realised on the banks of the Vistula.<sup>8</sup>

8 Cf. Jolanta Szymkowska-Bartyzel, *Amerykański mit polski konsument czyli reklamowe oblicza Ameryki* [American Myth: Polish Consumers, i.e. the Face of America in the Form of Advertising], Cracow 2006, p. 68–79; Victoria de Grazia, *Irresistible Empire. America's Advance through Twentieth-Century Europe*, Cambridge, Massachusetts 2005, *passim*.

## Historical reasons

“The most important thing is life. And where there is life, the most important thing is freedom. And there is no freedom without democracy”.<sup>9</sup> These words were said by Marek Edelman, a survivor of the Holocaust and opponent of the Polish Communist dictatorship, on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Polish freedom movement *Solidarność* (Solidarity).

The freedom movement in Poland has a long tradition. Its development is connected to the creation of a modern national consciousness, which began even before the country was annexed by its neighbours through the three successive partitions after 1773. Polish immigrants’ participation in the American war of independence turned America into a model for Polish freedom fighters. The Polish Constitution of May 3<sup>rd</sup> 1791 and Kościusko’s Manifesto of Połaniec became the essential ingredients of the Polish national narrative. Thus, the independence of Poland was perceived to be necessary, both as a national process and as a political, individual process. For the Polish insurgents, who in the nineteenth century fought against Russian despotism, an independent state was only one of many dreams: they also wanted a state with all the democratic liberties they believed Americans enjoyed.

Polish national narratives of freedom became attached to views of the past, which were of very different origins. The old traditions of the Polish noble republic united with the new heroic tales of resistance provided material to form the historical consciousness of the nation. When, after the First World War a new Polish state arose from the ashes of the conflict, the idea of freedom was an important part of its political culture. Even during the era of Józef Piłsudski’s authoritarian system the myth of America as the land of freedom survived.

Polish immigrants to the USA played an important role in the Polish perception of America. Within the Polish society a myth emerged, according to which America was deemed a “Paradise on Earth”, a land of unlimited possibilities, where everyone could succeed if he only wanted to.

In Chicago, New York, Pittsburgh, Milwaukee and other cities Polish-American press, a Polish theatre and Polish literature developed to a vast extent.<sup>10</sup> Polish settlements in the United States became particularly numerous after 1848, when in Europe’s “Springtime of Nations” the veterans of a succession of failed Polish insurrections against foreign rule fled to the United States. Polish emigration to the United States increased as a result of the gradual capitalist transformation and the modernisation of the Polish countryside after 1850. Between 1850 and 1920 2.5 million ethnic Poles (including regional subgroups)

9 Marek Edelman na 25. rocznicę “Solidarności” [Marek Edelman on the 25th Anniversary of *Solidarność*]. In: *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 2. September 2005, p. 2.

10 Cf. Karen Majewski, *Traitors and True Poles. Narrating a Polish-American Identity, 1880–1939*, Ohio 2003, p. 15.

left for the USA.<sup>11</sup> After the First World War between 2.25 and 3.0 million Poles resided in the USA and from 1919 to 1939 approximately 284,000 inhabitants of Poland settled in the USA. They arrived directly from Poland. However, also a re-emigration from the USA back to Poland occurred, mainly in the period 1919 to 1939. During this period 125,000 Poles re-emigrated from the USA to Poland. The main reasons for this decision were the hope to be able to regain Polish liberty after the First World War followed by the wish to help the homeland during the Polish-Russian war. During the Communist era Poles did not return from the USA.<sup>12</sup>

After the Second World War new waves of Polish immigrants reshaped the Polish minority in the United States. Between 1945 and 1990 approximately 368,000 political exiles and displaced persons arrived in the United States. The political immigrants were primarily searching for freedom in the USA.<sup>13</sup>

The Polish immigration to the USA during the First World War as well as the emigration and re-emigration in the following decades contributed to the development of the United States' image in Poland. Personal experiences gained while living in the USA became the Poles' collective experiences.<sup>14</sup>

Poland and the United States first established diplomatic relations in 1919 during the presidency of Woodrow Wilson. In Woodrow Wilson's "14 Point Program" the thirteenth point concerned the reestablishment of Polish independence. The myth of Wilson as a great ally of Poland was based on this foundation. Therefore, Polish children learned at school that Poland owed the return of independence to US President Woodrow Wilson and to the Versailles Peace Treaty. Indeed, many academics of political science and journalists see the chain of events, which took place in 1919, as one of the most important roots of the current Polish pro-Atlanticism. It is often forgotten that the president also made critical statements about Poland and Polish immigrants in the USA.<sup>15</sup>

Herbert C. Hoover was also of great importance for the Poles. He was at the head of the American Relief Administration (ARA), which between 1919 and 1922 uninterruptedly provided Poland with material aid.<sup>16</sup> In his journals from the years 1874–1929 Hoover dedicated many words to Poland.<sup>17</sup>

11 Cf. Dictionary of American History, vol. 6, New York 2003; Andrzej Brożek, *Polish Americans 1854–1939*, Warsaw 1985.

12 Cf. Krzysztof Michałek, *W poszukiwaniu nowej Kolchidy – czyli o źródłach proamerykanizmu w Polsce w latach 1918–1989* [The Search For the New Colchis: On the New Sources of Pro-Americanism in Poland between 1918–1989]. In: Kolarska-Bobińska/Kucharczyk/Kaczyński (ed.), *Mosty przez Atlantyk*, p. 15–34, here 17.

13 Cf. Hieronim Kubiak, *Wyobrażenia o kraju imigracyjnym* [Images of the Immigration Land]. In: Krystyna Slany (ed.), *Orientacje emigracyjne Polaków* [The Orientations of the Polish Immigration], Cracow 1997.

14 Cf. Michałek, *W poszukiwaniu nowej Kolchidy*, p. 17 f. See also: Tomasz Zalewski, *Mała emigracja* [The Little Emigration]. In: *Polityka*, 35 (2006), p. 54 f.

15 Cf. Login Pastusiak, *Prezydenci amerykańscy wobec spraw polskich* [American Presidents and the Polish Issue], Warsaw 2003, p. 54–71.

16 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 76–92.

17 Cf. *The Memoirs of Herbert Hoover. Years of Adventure 1874–1929*, New York 1951.

During the Second World War American values, including freedom, were broadcast to the front through American media such as the radio station "Voice of America". The influence of American radio programs on the world view of the Poles increased during the *Cold War*. At the beginning of the nineteen-eighties "Voice of America", "Radio Free Europe" and other smaller radio stations were heard by 70 % of all Polish radio owners.<sup>18</sup>

The tragedies of the Second World War and that Poland became a Communist dictatorship after the war, gave the notion of freedom even more importance than ever before for the Poles. The new Communist state was seen by the people as a half-sovereign country and the lack of liberties was all too evident not to be perceived. In such times the idea of freedom became a value in itself, which the growing opposition, even from the right side of the political spectrum, accepted as a given fact. The reminder of President Wilson's pro-Polish attitude and the myth of American and Western style freedom provided the opposition with a model for a political alternative to Communism.

The Communist propaganda against the United States nevertheless had a counterproductive effect: "the Poles longed for American Liberty, which was forbidden and therefore attractive".<sup>19</sup> After the relaxation in 1956 American institutions and media were also present in Communist Poland. Since 1959 the magazine *America*, which was published in Poland by the United States Information Agency (USIA) and quite clearly produced a positive image of America, was on sale. It is interesting that this medium was not effected by censoring and was sold by many newsagents. All together during the *Cold War* the average Polish reader had much easier access to American literature than readers in many other countries within the Soviet Block. The number of American titles constantly increased. The Polish public was even familiar with American films. 366 American films were brought to Poland between 1945–1963. American art and music were present in Polish everyday life, with the exception of the period between 1947–1956 and after the introduction of the state of war on 13<sup>th</sup> December 1981 until 1988. In the seventies during Edward Gierek's period of openness to the West the films were even supported by the Polish government.<sup>20</sup>

Since the second half of the fifties, after Dwight Eisenhower recognised Poland as "the window in the Iron Curtain"<sup>21</sup> the American embassy supported the activities of the largest American foundations: the Rockefeller Foundation and the Ford Foundation, in Poland. In 1956 the Fulbright program began work. It had the task of spreading a positive image of America in Polish academic institutes. Thanks to the financial and organisational support of the USA, above all the USIA, the first institute for American Studies in the Soviet Block was established in 1976 in Poland. The basis for its establishment was the cooperation be-

18 Cf. Michałek, W poszukiwaniu nowej Kolchidy, p. 22 f.

19 Kolarska-Bobińska/Kucharczyk/Kaczyński (ed.), *Mosty przez Atlantykę?*, p. 10.

20 Cf. Michałek, W poszukiwaniu nowej Kolchidy, p. 23, 31–33.

21 Cf. Pastusiak, *Prezydenci amerykańscy*, p. 131–142.



tween the Indiana University and the University of Warsaw. The aim was the further development of the program for American studies in Poland.<sup>22</sup>

The incidents in 1968 had a totally different meaning in Eastern Europe and in Western Europe. As in other Eastern European countries under Communist rule, the Polish people did not oppose the “American Imperialism”, but rather the “Soviet Empire”. In those days the fascination with America was consolidated because the “horizons of liberty” could be found there.<sup>23</sup> Later, President Reagan, and with him the USA as a whole, were seen as the liberators from the Communist dictatorship and guides leading the way towards freedom and democracy.<sup>24</sup> In Polish political opinion it was not the Western European policy of Détente and Eastern Policy (Ostpolitik) of the nineteen-seventies but Ronald Reagan’s policy of confrontation that contributed to the collapse of the Soviet system. During the nineteen-eighties the United States financially, politically and morally supported the Polish Freedom Movement *Solidarność* (Solidarity).<sup>25</sup> Former intellectual dissidents, such as Adam Michnik, recognised the American “mission of democratisation” in the destruction of dictatorships. Thus in their opinion because the United States helped to defeat Communism in the past they can presently contribute to the fall of other totalitarian systems.<sup>26</sup>

After the end of the *Cold War* the United States of America became Poland’s most important partner. The first non-Communist prime minister, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, emphasised in a speech in September 1989 that Poland wanted to develop a good relationship with America, in order to catch up as soon as possible with all the missed opportunities of the past. Since the beginning of the nineteen-nineties the USA has consistently been Poland’s first choice despite the changes on the political scene. The new Polish president, Lech Kaczyński is continuing with the pro-American policy of his predecessor, Aleksander Kwaśniewski.<sup>27</sup> Prime minister, Jarosław Kaczyński, insists that the deepening of European Union identity may not lead to a confrontation with the USA.<sup>28</sup>

In Polish public opinion the anti-American position, which many Western European countries adhere to, is perceived to be associated with Communism.

22 Cf. Michałek, W poszukiwaniu nowej Kolchidy, p. 24.

23 Cf. Janusz A. Majcherek, Warschau – Washington: Warum lieben die Polen Amerika? In: DIALOG, 64 (2003), p. 23.

24 Pastusiak, Prezydenci amerykańscy, p. 250.

25 Cf. Michałek, W poszukiwaniu nowej Kolchidy, p. 25.

26 Cf. Jacques Rupnik, Amerikas beste Freunde in Europa. Die USA von Ostmitteleuropa aus gesehen. In: Transit. Europäische Revue, 27 (2004), p. 29–52, here 34 and 38.

27 Cf. Justyna Zając, Rozwój stosunków polsko-amerykańskich po zimnej wojnie [The Development of the Polish-American Relations After the Cold War]. In: La Musa 2006, forthcoming. Also see the analyses of Polish-American relations in the yearbooks of the Polish Foreign Policy (Rocznik Polskiej Polityki Zagranicznej), Warsaw (Yearbooks 1991–2005).

28 Premier: Polska chce silnej UE [Prime Minister: Poland Wishes for a Well Developed EU]. In: Gazeta Wyborcza, 8. September 2006, p. 4.

Anti-Americanism was a hallmark of the Communist propaganda. Thus this critical perspective does not earn much recognition among the Polish people.<sup>29</sup>

The idealisation of Polish-American historical relations contributes to the Poles' association of the USA with freedom, prosperity and security. Władysław Bartoszewski, Poland's former foreign minister, explains his country's cordial attitude towards America by stating that the Americans have always regarded the Poles as their allies and as such never fought against them: "One has to be totally ignorant of politics and history not to understand, that the grandparents of today's American population decisively contributed to the recovery of Poland's independence."<sup>30</sup>

In this form, the idea of freedom in Poland has become very closely linked to the idea of national independence. According to this idea of freedom, the United States have always been viewed as a country that helped Poland on her journey to freedom and independence.

### Defence policy purposes

A primary motive for Poland's strong support of American policy lies in defence policy interests. Both sides of the Atlantic are dominated by diverging conceptions of foreign and defence policy: the "hard" policy of the United States, which stands for an interventionist, military oriented course, and the "soft" policy of the European Union, which cannot offer the same security guarantees the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation can give.<sup>31</sup>

Janusz Reiter, the Polish ambassador to the USA, observed that these two conceptions collided over the issue of the Iraq conflict. Poland is not ready to renounce the hard security granted by NATO in favour of the "soft" safety provided by the EU. According to many Polish politicians the USA can offer a clear line and a "safe" defence concept.

The prevailing opinion is that one can rely on the United States should anything happen to one's country. Robert Kagan's thesis, according to which the tenets of a "soft" coexistence policy are difficult to implement in Europe, has gained much support in Poland.<sup>32</sup>

In autumn 1992 Poland announced that she wanted to become a member of the NATO. Warsaw sought Washington's support in this venture. The USA has continually provided this support since 1994. At the NATO summit in Madrid in

29 Cf. Kolarska-Bobińska/Kucharczyk/Kaczyński (ed.), *Mosty przez Atlantyk?*, p. 8.

30 *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 15. April 2003, p. 12.

31 Cf. Dariusz Serówka, *Wielka piaskownica. Rola USA w europejskiej polityce bezpieczeństwa i obronności* [The Big Sandpit. The Role of the USA in the European Security and Defence Policy], Cracow 2003.

32 Cf. Piotr Kazmierkiewicz (ed.), *Securing America and Europe*, Warsaw 2004, p. 43–52.

July 1997 Poland along with the Czech Republic and Hungary were invited to accession negotiations. Poland had been a NATO member since 12<sup>th</sup> May 1999 and actively takes part in NATO operations. At present NATO plays a central role in Polish Security Policy.<sup>33</sup> Among the Polish population there has long been much support for NATO. In 2002 64 % of the population supported NATO and it was only in 2006 that support shrunk to 48 %.<sup>34</sup>

Historical fears also play an important role in sustaining the pro-American stance. There is still a subconscious fear of neighbouring Russia. Talks held between France, Germany and Russia in recent years reminded the Polish public of past political constellations, which leads Poland to fear being overrun by mighty foreign interests. From the Polish perspective the support of US policy in Iraq could have lead to a cooling down of the relations between the United States and Russia.<sup>35</sup>

Among the European countries Poland is the most supportive of George W. Bush's political course. In 2004 his policies were supported by 12 % of the French, 12 % of the Germans, 27 % of the British, 30 % of the Italians and 42 % of the Poles.<sup>36</sup> During the "Iraq Crisis" the Polish government fully supported the American course. President Kwaśniewski proclaimed, "If it is President Bush's vision, it is mine".<sup>37</sup> At the time the majority of Polish politicians were of the opinion that the Americans had helped Poland during the two world wars, now it was Poland's turn to return the favour. Many politicians feared that should Poland refuse to take part in the intervention in Iraq, eventually America would refuse to help Poland in the case of a threat. At the time, however, the pro-American orientation of Polish foreign policy about the engagement in the Gulf was a sort of insurance policy (Police), which was intended to protect Poland's security. Additionally Poland hoped that in connection to her involvement in the War she would become America's most important partner in the region.<sup>38</sup>

33 Cf. Zając, *Rozwój stosunków polsko-amerykańskich*. See also: Ryszard Zięba, *Polityka w ramach NATO i wobec Unii Europejskiej* [The Politics within the Framework of NATO and Regarding the European Union]. In: Justyna Zając (ed.), *Polityka zagraniczna USA po Zimnej Wojnie* [The Foreign Policy of the USA After the Cold War], Toruń 2006, p. 33–66.

34 Cf. Transatlantic Trends. Key Findings 2006. [http://www.transatlantictrends.org/doc/2006\\_TT\\_Key%20Findings%20FINAL.pdf](http://www.transatlantictrends.org/doc/2006_TT_Key%20Findings%20FINAL.pdf) (11.9.2006).

35 Cf. Kai-Olaf Lang, *Trojanische Pferde der USA oder proeuropäische Atlantiker? Die neuen Mitglieder der EU und ihr Verhältnis zu Amerika*, SWP-Study 2003/46, p. 5.

36 Cf. Mateusz Fałkowski, *Postawy Polaków wobec Stanów Zjednoczonych, Amerykanów i stosunków transatlantyckich* [The Attitudes of the Poles towards the United States, the Americans and the Transatlantic Relationship]. In: Kolarska-Bobińska/Kucharczyk/Kaczyński (ed.), *Mosty przez Atlantyk*, p. 35–56, here 54.

37 David E. Sanger, *Threats and Responses: The Continent. To Some in Europe, The Major Problem Is Bush the Cowboy*. In: *The New York Times*, 24. January 2003.

38 Cf. Roman Kuźniar/Andrzej Szeptycki, *Rola Stanów Zjednoczonych w polityce zagranicznej III RP* [The Role of the United States in the Foreign Policy of the III People's Republic of Poland]. In: Kolarska-Bobińska/Kucharczyk/Kaczyński (ed.), *Mosty przez Atlantyk*, p. 113–149, here 130–132.

Poland was also one of the few nations, which positively viewed George W. Bush's re-election; the Polish majority regarded it as a positively influence on world peace and security.<sup>39</sup> Many Poles see in him the successor to Ronald Reagan, who still enjoys much popularity in Poland today.<sup>40</sup>

### **"Liberty" of the market and every day culture**

The positive attitude towards a certain country is often connected to the fact that one can identify with the values, traditions and lifestyles that are predominant there. Are the existing socio-economic, political and religious models in the USA similar to those of the Poles? Do the Poles have similar outlook on life to the Americans? Do the majority of Poles identify themselves with the liberal mode as the Americans do or do they empathise with welfare state, which is based on state intervention and is prevalent in Western Europe? Are the attitudes of the Poles similar to those, which dominate the liberal American society or do the Poles desire a European model? The Poles are often of the opinion that if a system of society and economy functions one hundred percent then it is the American model.<sup>41</sup> However, do the Poles know how the American model functions or is it a type of myth?

The choice of a socio-economic model is connected to the attitude towards social inequalities. In Poland one can observe a strong trend towards the free market. The increase in inequalities during the course of the nineties in Poland lead to the renunciation of the neo-liberal value system. The need for equality is much more wide-spread in Poland than in the USA. While 71 % of Americans prefer freedom, only 55 % of Poles believe that freedom is more important than equality. Here the values in Poland are similar to those of pre-enlargement EU. A great difference is found in relationship to the conviction that the government should remove existing inequalities. While 62 % of Poles desire state intervention in this case, only 19 % of the Americans share this opinion.

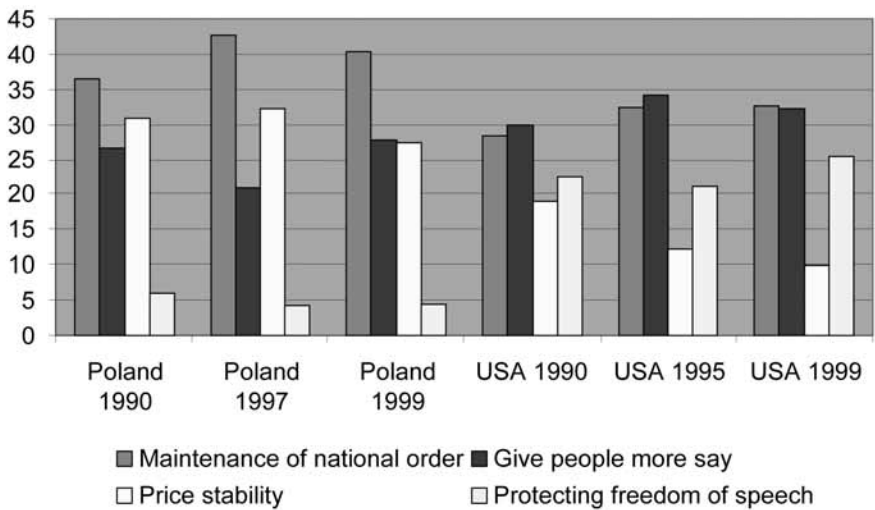
In the nineteen-nineties as Central and Eastern Europe was still in the process of transformation, a big difference between the personal preferences of the Poles and the US-American citizens could be deducted. To a much further extent than the US citizens the Poles supported the preservation of order. Rising prices bothered the Poles much more than the US-Americans. Freedom of speech significantly played a more important role in the USA than in Poland.

39 Cf. Fałkowski, *Postawy Polaków*, p. 54.

40 Cf. Kuźniar/Szeptycki, *Rola Stanów Zjednoczonych*, p. 148.

41 Cf. Europejskie marzenie [The European Dream]. In: *Rzeczpospolita*, 10.-11. December 2005, p. 7. See in more detail: Katarzyna Anna Chwalbińska, *American Foreign Policy in the Era of Globalization*. In: *Studies & Analyses*, 4 (2003), p. 17-38.

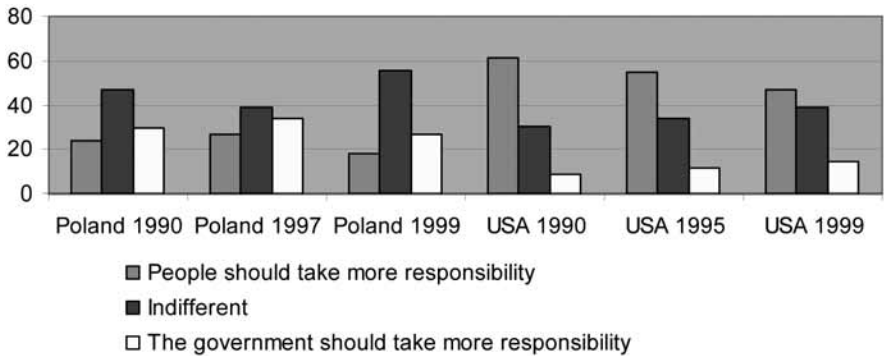
Figure 1: Personal Preferences



Source: World Value Survey

The US citizens also desired more personal responsibility than the Poles (see figure 2). The Poles' wish for more personal responsibility remained just as strong at the beginning and at the end of the transformation phase.

Figure 2: Personal Responsibility



Source: World Value Survey

This development only slightly changed in the further course of the transformation. An international comparative study carried out in 2000<sup>42</sup> showed that the

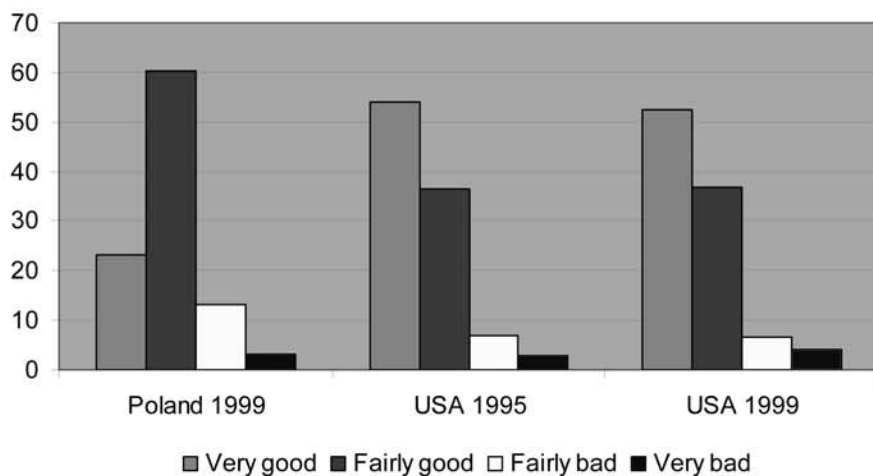
<sup>42</sup> World Value Survey, 2000.

Polish public opinion strongly supported economic state interventionism, indeed to a much greater extent than the population of the fifteen EU member states (prior to the 2004 enlargement). The Poles more often wish for a higher degree of state control for privately owned firms and are less ready to grant them freedom than the inhabitants of the “old” EU are. In almost all EU countries the majority of those questioned supported loosening state control of the economy. In Poland, it was the opposite. 56 % of Poles believed that the state should more strictly control firms. Only 22 % of Poles agreed that the state should allow businesses more freedom. The Americans were more convinced than the Poles that the remuneration should be dependant on the quality of the work, position of responsibility and how hard one works. The majority of Poles in this respect had an egalitarian opinion.<sup>43</sup>

Competition on the labour market was also less accepted in Poland than in the USA. The statement “Competition is a good thing. It motivates people to work better and have new ideas” was positively answered by 71 % of the Americans and 59 % of the Poles. In the pre-2004 European Union 58 % of the respondents answered “yes” to this question.

The US citizens believed more in the importance of democracy than the Poles did. In 1999 the majority of Americans found the existing democracy “very good”, while the Poles generally found it “fairly good”. It is significant that this development in the USA remains stable.

Figure 3: Having a democratic political system is ...



Source: World Value Survey

43 Cf. Wenzel/Zagórski, Między amerykańskim a europejskim modelem społecznym, p. 58, 63–68.

In Poland the belief in the positive effects of democracy on the economy was also much less common. While in both Western Europe and the United States a clear majority of those questioned (two thirds) felt a democratic economy works well, only half of the Polish respondents shared this opinion.<sup>44</sup>

Nevertheless, freedom of speech is currently very important for Poles. To the question on the impact of the freedom movement *Solidarność* more than 50 % of the respondents answered that the most important thing, which this movement achieved, was freedom of speech.<sup>45</sup>

On the question of religiosity the Americans and Poles show marked similarities. 95 % of Poles declared that they believed in God, in the USA the figure was 92 % of the population. While in the old EU 17 % of those questioned agreed with the statement that no religion held much truth, in both America and Poland only 4 % agreed with this statement. Americans and Poles trust the Church and Church organisations to a much greater extent than the citizens of the old EU. The statement that religion causes conflict rather than peace and that highly religious people are often intolerant was generally accepted in the old EU and received confirmation to a much less extent in Poland and the USA. The religiosity of the Poles and the Americans is marked by a much more traditional position on marriage, sexual activity and abortion than in West Europe. In contrast to the West Europeans the Poles and Americans only seldom believe marriage is an out-dated institution and are very critical of couples living together before marriage.<sup>46</sup>

## Parallels to the Czech Republic?

Is it possible to compare the strong resemblance in Poland to America to the developments in other East Central Europe countries? In the following sections Poland's neighbouring country, the Czech Republic, will be considered.

In contrast to Poland the fear of Russia is not so wide spread in the Czech Republic. This leads to a certain difference in her relationship with the USA. According to a survey from November 2004, 87 % of the Czechs found the role of the Soviet Army in liberating Europe important. In contrast 83 % of the Czechs regarded the role of the United States as important.<sup>47</sup>

The support for the United States is lower in the Czech Republic than in Poland. In relation to political and economic co-operation the USA only ranks at

44 Ibid., p. 67–69.

45 Cf. Rzeczpospolita, 16. August 2005.

46 Cf. Wenzel/Zagórski, Między amerykańskim a europejskim modelem społecznym, p. 77–81.

47 Cf. Věra Řiháčková, Republika Česka: europeizacja niechętnego atlantysty? [The Czech Republic: The Europeanisation of a Unwilling Atlantacist?]. In: Kolarska-Bobińska/Kucharczyk/Kaczyński (ed.), Mosty przez Atlantyk, p. 151–175, here 153.

place five on the Czech list, behind Slovakia, Germany, Poland and Austria.<sup>48</sup> The differentiation between the desire for political connection to the USA and the economic co-operation with the EU, which is noticeable in Poland, is not present in the Czech Republic. The USA appear neither politically nor economically as important for the Czech Republic as her direct neighbours do. According to the Czech public opinion institute, STEM, which carried out a representative survey in December 2002, 75 % of the Czech population supported the coordination of Czech politics with the European Union. The importance of the coordination of the Czech politics with that of the USA was only valued by 37 % of the Czechs. More than 50 % of the Czech population were of the opinion that the Czech politic was correctly organised because it is organised differently to American politics.<sup>49</sup>

The majority of the Czechs (59 %) supported the EU's foreign policy towards third states. The support for the military intervention in Iraq was much lower in the Czech Republic than in Poland. In February 2003 67 % of the Czech population categorically rejected a military attack on Iraq and 76 % were against a military operation in Iraq without a UN mandate.<sup>50</sup> In March 2003 the proportion of war opponents had increased even more to 72 %. The number of war advocates only counted for 21 %. At this point many anti war demonstrations were also being held in the Czech Republic.<sup>51</sup> 57 % of the Czechs felt that the toppling of Saddam Hussein would not help improve world security.<sup>52</sup>

The public opinion of the Czechs on the Iraq conflict was in accordance with the position of the Czech politicians, as in comparison to Poland they were more reserved war advocates and more ambivalent. The former Czech President, Václav Havel, who supported the Gulf War, however expressed doubts, whether the timing and the course were right.<sup>53</sup> The President at that time, Václav Klaus, categorically rejected it. Against the backdrop of these facts it was easier for the Czechs to categorically turn against the war than for the Poles, whose President, Prime Minister as well as the foreign minister supported the USA's actions.

48 Cf. Falkowski, *Postawy Polaków*, p. 52; *Prager Zeitung*, 7. August 2003, p. 10.

49 Cf. Řiháčková, *Republika Czeska*, p. 160.

50 Cf. Spengler, *Länderbericht Tschechien*, February 2003, p. 1 f.

51 Cf. *Radio Prague*, 26. March 2003.

52 Cf. Řiháčková, *Republika Czeska*, p. 161.

53 Cf. *Radio Prague*, 5. September 2003.



## America – a Polish dream (“Freedom” or “Liberty”)

Poland has a long tradition of “freedom”, which is linked to her historical development and to the fact that for many centuries the country was not free. In the public opinion the gaining of freedom is connected to the assistance of the United States. This is closely linked to myths, which are a product of the idealisation of the USA. For example US President Woodrow Wilson is commonly seen as a great friend of Poland in Polish historiography. The fact that Wilson did not have any specific sympathy for Poland until he became president is seldom addressed. In his 1902 published book: *A History of the American People*, he described the Poles as people “without qualifications, energy, initiative or intelligence”.<sup>54</sup> Wilson wanted to reduce the numbers of Polish immigrants to the United States. Ten years later, already a presidency candidate, he renounced to his previous opinion in order to win the vote of Polish immigrants. Nevertheless, after his electoral victory of 1916 his remarks on the Polish immigrants were reprinted in the second edition of his book, even though Polish organisations insisted that he withdraw them.<sup>55</sup> It is often wilfully forgotten that Franklin D. Roosevelt proved himself to be disloyal towards Poland at the Conferences of Tehran and Yalta because he did not make a pledge on behalf of the USA guaranteeing Polish borders. During the negotiations in Yalta (4<sup>th</sup>–11<sup>th</sup> February 1945) Roosevelt voiced that for over 500 years Poland has been the source of numerous problems. In his letter to Stalin on the 6<sup>th</sup> February 1945 he emphasised that the USA would never help a provisional government in Poland, which represents other interests than those of the Soviet Union.<sup>56</sup> The position of the United States, which was adopted by state secretary James Byrnes in 1946 and state secretary George Marshall in 1947, was also unfavourable. In 1950 the USA supported the position that the Western border of Poland was a provisional border. They avoided commenting on the Eastern border because that did not concern solving the problems of hostile states. Therefore, Washington did not recognise Poland’s Western border, however, it did not question the eastern border.<sup>57</sup> In a telegram on 28<sup>th</sup> April 1953 the American embassy informed that Poland was in no position to restore the war damages in the western regions. Neither the Polish government nor the citizens would invest in this region. The conclusion was that the Poles clearly did not reckon that they would ever be permanently able to keep the region. The telegram was signed by the councillor of the United States, Loyd V. Steere. Another telegram dating 26<sup>th</sup> May 1953 reported of the fiasco of the settlement campaign in the Western territories.<sup>58</sup>

54 Woodrow Wilson, *A History of the American People*, Harper/New York 1902, p. 212 f.

55 Cf. Pastusiak, *Prezydenci amerykańscy*, p. 58.

56 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 93–114, here 108 f.

57 Cf. Longin Pastusiak, *Stosunki polsko-amerykańskie 1945–1955* [The Polish-American Relations 1945–1955], Toruń 2004, p. 508–511.

58 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 513.

The picture that the Poles have of the USA today is also influenced by myths. The Poles describe the USA as “the country of unlimited freedom”, where one can renounce the limitations imposed by one’s origins and traditions. The Polish perception of the United States is based on the American popular culture, of which the strongest influence is Hollywood-made movies and advertisement and which insufficiently reflects the real-life American society.<sup>59</sup>

If the Poles were to realise that the social constraints in the USA are just as strong as those existing in Poland, this would change their impression of the USA. The USA is attractive for Poles because of its difference to Poland, not because of any possible similarity to it.

This mythical impression of the USA has not led to the construction of an “American” socio-political model in Poland. The economy of the United States is very different to the Polish economy, as are the expectations, which both systems are confronted with.<sup>60</sup> It can definitely be said that in fact the concept of “liberty” is not as important to the Polish people as is often proclaimed. The Polish society is much more strongly oriented towards the historically bound concept of “freedom”.

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59 Cf. Szymkowska-Bartyzel, *Amerykański mit*, passim.

60 Cf. Wenzel/Zagórski, *Między amerykańskim a europejskim modelem społecznym*, p. 84.